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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000760

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BD](#) [BGD](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER RETURNS TO PARLIAMENT: DEMANDS

BNP/JI CONSIDER REFORMS

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b)

¶1. (SBU) On the evening of February 12, opposition leader Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League (AL) returned to Parliament ending a nearly 14 month boycott. Under Parliamentary rules, the AL had until February 14 to take their seats or forfeit them. On July 14, 2004 the AL walked out of Parliament and started their boycott as part of an effort to force the government to hold early elections.

¶2. (SBU) Sheikh Hasina, speaking for nearly an hour, presented her electoral and caretaker reform packages to Parliament, and attacked the government for failing to deal effectively with the rise in food and fuel price, corruption, insufficient electrical power, fuel and fertilizer, the controversial partisan appointment of 2 election commissioners, and for permitting the rise of militancy. She threatened to resign if the government did not consider her proposals.

¶3. (SBU) Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, and BNP Secretary General, Abdul Mannan Bhuyian replied that the government is ready to discuss ways that elections are held in a more credible and fair manner. AL lawmakers retorted that they expect a response from Prime Minister Zia. (PM Zia is in Pakistan.)

¶4. (C) BNP MP Zahir Uddin Swapon told poloff that the return of the AL to Parliament was a "good sign." He explained that because BDG politics is centered on elections, AL's return is a "positive motion in using the political process." Now Parliament has something to discuss. He opined that the proposals, which are not yet bills ready for consideration by Parliament, would be discussed both informally and formally by the appropriate standing committee.

¶5. (C) Jatiya Party MP Ghulam M. Quader told poloff that if the BNP is serious about discussing any reforms, the Speaker will call the Chief Whips from both parties to form a select committee to consider the issues. He said that this Parliament session was to end on February 15 but now that AL has returned the session might be extended another 15 days.

¶6. (SBU) The media noted the presence in Parliament of Charge D'Affaires as well as diplomats from the UK, EU, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

¶7. (C) Comment: While the BNP might consider modest electoral reforms, there is no reason to think it would budge on keeping the caretaker system as it is presently structured.
CHAMMAS